(iv) India also has bilateral trade treaties with Nepal and Bhutan, under which duty-free access has been provided to goods from these two countries, on non-reciprocal basis.

(b) to (d) In order to protect the farmers most of the primary agricultural products are kept in the sensitive/negative list of items on which limited or no tariff concessions are granted under the FTA. The reductions in customs duties are offered taking into account the sensitivities of the Indian agriculture and the volume of trade in these products. Appropriate measures in case of India—Sri Lanka FTA, like allowing import of Betel Nuts only through Mangalore Port; allowing imports of desiccated coconut upto 500 Metric Tons per annum at 30% duty; a Tariff Rate Quota of 2500 MTs on import of paper were taken to safeguard our interest. In addition, in case of a surge in imports and injury to the domestic industry, a country is allowed to take measures such as anti-dumping and safeguards under these agreements.

Steps to improve industrial growth

2506. SHRIMATI SUPRIYA SULE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether industrial growth slipped to 7.6 per cent during December, 2007 from 13.4 per cent in December, 2006;

(b) if so, whether economists have pointed out that December performance was on expected lines and this prognosis doesn't seem bright for the rest of financial year; and

(c) if so, what were the main reasons and what are the concrete measures to be considered to improve the industrial growth?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) The industrial growth, measured in terms of Index of Industrial Production (IIP), was 7.7% during December 2007 compared to 13.4% during December 2006.

(b) and (c) The industrial slowdown is generally being attributed by the economists to higher interest rate, slower consumer demand, slackening of exports due to rupee-appreciation, general global economic slowdown, etc. For the first 10 months of current financial year (April-January, 2007-08), the industrial growth was 8.7% compared to 11.2% during corresponding period of last year.

The Government has put in place various policies to promote broad based industrial growth. This includes, *inter-alia*, delicensing of industrial capacity, liberalization of foreign trade regime to provide better access to inputs at competitive prices, rationalization and reduction in duty rates of customs and central excise, better infrastructure support, and liberal FDI regime, etc.

In the Budget 2008-09, the Government has proposed reduction in excise duty across the board from 16% to 14% to boost the domestic demand for the manufacturing industry. In addition, the Government has also proposed reduction in excise duty from 16% to 12% in the Budget 2008-09 for Small Cars, Motorcycles, and Scooters etc. to give boost to the domestic consumer durable manufacturing industry.

Government has also announced several relief measures for export oriented industries, which includes enhancement of the Duty Entitlement Pass Book (DEPB), reduction in Export

Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) premium by 10%, enhancement of the rates of duty drawback, interest subvention of pre-shipment and post-shipment credit, refund of service tax, raising the revenue ceiling for Vishesh Krishi and Gram Udyog Yojana.

Revival package for tea plantation

2507. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Central Government sanctioned a revival package for plantations;

(b) if so, the details thereof including the number of plantations considered for the package: State-wise;

(c) whether Government received separate proposal from the Government of Kerela for taking over closed/abandoned tea plantation in the State; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and steps taken by the centre to consider the proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) A rehabilitation package was sanctioned by the Government on June 29, 2007 for 33 tea gardens, lying closed as on 1.4.2007 affecting more than 30,000 workers. 17 of these gardens are in West Bengal, 14 in Kerala and 2 in Assam. 11 of these gardens have now reopened. The package provides for restructuring of outstanding bank dues, provision of fresh working capital with interest subsidy from Government, waiver of outstanding loan due to Tea Board and settlement of provident fund dues in instalments. Once the accounts of these gardens are regularised, these will become eligible for loan for replanting under the Special Purpose Tea Fund and subsidy for machinery items under Quality Upgradation Scheme of Tea Board.

(c) and (d) The aforesaid rehabilitation package was announced after consideration of all the proposals received in this regard, including the proposal from the Government of Kerala.

SEZs approved by Government

2508. SHRI PRAVEEN RASHTRAPAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) how many Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have been approved by Government till 31st December, 2007, State-wise;

(b) how many have started manufacturing activities as on 31st December, 2007;

(c) what is the amount invested by these SEZs in the form of capital; and

(d) what is the total number of employment provided by these SEZs State-wise as on 31st December, 2007?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) State-wise numbers of SEZs formally approved till 31st December, 2007 are as under: